

# InFused

By Daniela Henry

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Zugänglichmachung.

From the honest and slightly jaded mind of writer Daniela Henry, this collection of essays is full of hopeful reminders, gentle truths, dark humor, and art inspired by personal growth.

Even small changes help us transform as life unfolds, whether you are chasing your dreams or still trying to get out of bed. You are here but you are not alone. As the saying goes: When life hands you lemons, make lemonade out of it. Smile. Don't take your life, yourself, and things too seriously and remember: this too shall pass.

Now, enjoy my book and let yourself be infused and filled with emotions and quality.

For J.H. – my heart and W.H. - my light and rock

“*Ich* ist nur rein brauchbares Wort für jemanden, den es nicht wirklich gibt. Lügen werden über meine Lippen fließen, aber vielleicht hat sich ein bisschen Wahrheit daruntergemischt; es liegt an Ihnen, diese Wahrheit ausfindig zu machen und zu entscheiden, ob irgendetwas daran bewahrenswert ist.“

“Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping.”

*Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own*

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## .What I Wish I Had Known.

Buy, don't rent.

Don't buy anything that is 100 percent wool even if it seems to be very soft and not particularly itchy when you try it on in the store.

You can't be friends with people who badmouth you behind your back.

You never know.

Anything you think is wrong with your body at the age of thirty-five you will be nostalgic for at the age of forty-five.

Write everything down. Keep a journal.

Take more pictures.

The empty nest is underrated.

You can order more than one dessert.

You can't own too many black t-shirts and turtleneck sweaters.

If the shoe doesn't fit in the shoe store, it's never going to fit.

When your children are teenagers, it's important to have a dog so that someone in the house is happy to see you.

Back up your files.

Overinsure everything. Especially when you have kids.

Whenever someone says the words “Our friendship is more important than this,” watch out, because it almost never is.

The reason you are waking up in the middle of the night is the second glass of wine. Consider stop drinking alcohol (at least for a while).

The minute you decide to get divorced, go see a lawyer and file the papers.

Overtip.

Never let them know everything.

If only one third of your clothes are mistakes, you are ahead of the game.

If friends ask you to be their child’s guardian in case they die in a plane crash, you can say no.

Life goes on. It always does.

Seize the day.

It could always be worse.

Eat, drink, and be merry.

Let’s put little smiley faces on our faces.

Consider the alternatives.

## .Diets.

### FRENCH WOMEN DON'T GET FAT

**Instructions:** Eat minuscule portions of your favourite foods with a vintage seafood fork. Serve poached pears at dinner parties. Start wearing scarves and smoking a pack of cigarettes a day; hiss at fat people.

**Pros:** A single tarte tatin from the farmers' market can last up to five days.

**Cons:** Clarins anti-aging serum is no match for cigarettes. Also, you're starving.

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### INTERMITTENT FASTING

**Instructions:** Incorporate large intervals of not eating into your day and/or week (e.g., eat all meals within a window of six to eight hours).

**Cons:** Ruin brunch by skipping it in favour of a twenty-gram buttered coffee and telling everyone about your new podcast. Hangry mood swings.

**Pros:** Unlike other diets, hangry mood swings happen at predictable times.

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### KETO DIET

**Instructions:** Eat 70 percent fat by combining eggs, bacon, nut butters, and artificial sweeteners into uncanny valley analogs of real

foods. Say, “I’m in ketosis,” to excuse a host of unpleasant interpersonal behaviours.

**Pros:** Finally put all those leftover mayonnaise packets to use; weekly grocery shopping can eventually be replaced by a single meat party platter and a bag of almonds.

**Cons:** Excruciating bowel movements once every six days; scurvy.

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## FRUIT DIET

**Instructions:** Add half a grapefruit to every low-fat, low-calorie meal. Add whole grapefruits in between meals to maintain homeostasis. Otherwise eat more fruit.

**Pros:** Generous bulk discount from Metro; no more scurvy.

**Cons:** Ruin brunch by explaining how fruits interaction with bread has sent you to the Emergency Room multiple times; soft teeth; diarrhea. Only suitable for hot weather countries. You always feel cold.

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## MALL/STORE DIET

**Instructions:** Practice portion control by eating only free samples. Get upward of 15,000 steps per day by walking laps through a cavernous warehouse.

**Pros:** Discovery of Kellogg’s Signature Cashew Clusters Cereal

**Cons:** High risk of derailing diet and over-drafting checking account from regularly purchasing Kellogg’s Signature Cashew Clusters; Wednesday samples are mostly Tide Pods and flavoured seltzers.

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## RAW VEGAN DIET

**Instructions:** Consume only uncooked, plant-based foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds soaked in water). Maintain unblinking eye contact with anyone eating bacon.

**Pros:** God-like sense of superiority.

**Cons:** Impossible to talk about “eating nut cheese” with a straight face; blood transfusion for iron deficiency not covered by insurance; ruin brunch with horror stories about concentrated animal feeding operations.

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## Noom Diet

**Instructions:** Pay seventy euros a month to count calories in an app and receive daily reminders that celery is less calorie dense than cake.

**Pros:** Fleeting sense of accomplishment from signing up and paying for a service.

**Cons:** Ruin brunch by assessing the calorie density of your friends’ meals; targeted ads for Noom for the rest of your life.

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## PALEO DIET

**Instructions:** Emulate our paleolithic ancestors by eating only foods that could be obtained by hunting and gathering.

**Pros:** Local cave system maintains baseline temperature of 10 degrees Celsius year round (expedient housing option after going bankrupt from all that meat); new bow-hunting skills useful in the event of societal collapse.

**Cons:** Local cave system inhabited by Neanderthal enthusiasts; no electrical outlets for your podcasting equipment; ruin brunch by wearing a complete fur outfit and a bone through your nose.

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BLACK MARKET DIET PILLS ALTERNATIVE  
(COMPOUNDED FROM  
ILLEGAL ONLINE PHARMACY)

**Instructions:** Once a week, inject your abdomen, upper arm, or thigh with the contents of an unlabeled syringe delivered by mail.

**Pros:** No targeted ads on the dark web.

**Cons:** Diet Pills take twenty years off your body and add them straight to your face; DEA watchlist; pancreatitis; you are no longer invited to brunch.

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NOT DIETING

**Instructions:** Eat what appeals to you when you are hungry. Stop when satisfied (or not).

**Pros:** Regained hours of time and attention.

**Cons:** None

## .Small Talk.

I'm afraid of small talk. Someone had to say it. "How's work?... It's been forever... This weather..." You've heard it all before. The traumatic aeon held captive in the chair of a loquacious hairdresser; the slow motion car-crash that follows eye contact with a one-night-stand at the supermarket; family Christmas. I'm sure you've all survived similarly wince-inducing "chatty" ordeals, but my god – it's been touch and go.

Luckily, a concerned colleague sent me some Harvard research suggesting that my aversion to small talk might be due to asking the wrong questions. Apparently, instead of settling for trite, tried-and-tested classics like "What do you do?" I should opt for more searching openers – ones that explore contexts beyond the familiar arena of pub chat fodder. So in the spirit of adventure, I went cold turkey and cut small talk out of my life.

My first step was drawing up a list of small talk reflexes to be banished.

### 1. 'IT'S BEEN FOREVER'

While this is often (unfortunately) not *literally* true, you have no other option than to agree, and then invariably overcompensate by forming elaborate plans to hang out every day for the following decade. "Forever?" It's probably been about three weeks, and we didn't have much to say to each other that time either.

### 2. 'HOW'S WORK?'

Surely work is the last thing anyone should be thinking or talking about in social small talk. That anyone would want to spend their fleeting leisure time fixating on the details of this labour is insane to



me. Oh, but you're *passionate* about management consultancy? Good for you.

### 3. 'THE WEATHER...'

A favoured staple of the English conversational diet. Although meteorological observations are inoffensive, it's hard to avoid conversation collapsing into a harrowing re-run of a French oral exam e.g. During le weekend, do you also play football with your friends in the park?

### 4. 'HOW ARE YOU?'

The cheek, the nerve, the gall, the audacity *and* the aggressiveness. What a terrifyingly intimate question. It reliably triggers paroxysms of anxiety, non-committal non-verbal grunts, and a search for the closest fire escape. Everyone will be relieved if you just say, "Yeah, not too bad," which can reliably be interpreted as anywhere between euphoric and suicidal.

### 5. 'BEEN BUSY?' / "WHAT TIME ARE YOU ON TILL?'

It's genuinely impossible to ask a taxi driver either of these questions without the following up with the other. And so begins 45 minutes of feigned sympathy with the cabbie's increasingly problematic political takes. You'll remember your headphones next time.

As you might imagine, my list of banned phrases got quite long, and involved several shopping trips to the murky mind-palace of small talk misery... I shall spare you both the boredom and the second-hand trauma.

My next challenge: Replace the forbidden small talk crutches, with the questions (somewhat questionably) scientifically assessed to make me "better liked by conversation partners". Yipee.

The *Harvard Business Review* kindly provided several examples from a psychologist to get the ball rolling. Unbound, I was finally emerging from Plato's cave of small talk superficiality, and striding straight to work to test my new lines.

### 1. 'WHAT EXCITES YOU RIGHT NOW?'

Not a great start. Maybe it was in my delivery. Maybe the wink was a bad idea. The wink was definitely a bad idea. Attempting this one again and receiving a confused answer related to the weather – mission aborted. But according to the Harvard shrink, this question “gives others the ability to give with a work-related answer, or talk about their kids, or their new boat, or basically anything that excites them”. As very few of my friends have kids, none own boats and only a couple would admit they have ever been excited, I started to suspect that this study might not have been road tested in a pub.

### 2. 'WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO?'

Invariably this resulted in my conversation partner asking whether they were looking especially sad. “No, you don't look sad, I just want to know what you're looking forward to.” This wasn't a great hit either – it gives slightly unhinged “I Can Save You” Energy, apparently. I tried to explain that they could just tell me about their weekend plans, but the damage was already done.

### 3. 'WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?'

Ask this anyone under 23 and they will respond blankly that they grew up “at home, I guess”. Ask this anyone over 23 and they think you are trying to commit credit card fraud.

### 4. 'IS THERE A CHARITABLE CAUSE YOU SUPPORT?'

Jesus wept. This was met by widespread suspicion that I was about to shake them down for a donation of some sort. The more I protested I just wanted to know if they supported a charity, the less they

believed me. Someone asked me if I was a Quaker, prompting a performatively longer coughing period. \*cough cough

##### 5. 'WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE SUPERHERO?'

This one went down as well as you might've imagined: like a pint of warm phlegm. However, there was one American who genuinely opened up to this – cue a 15-minute conspiracy theory about a comic book creator called Jamie Hewlett who is secretly Banksy. Unfortunately, I suspect that a positive response from an American could be achieved with any of the questions on this list, limiting their use as data points in this particular sociological study.

Disheartened and having exhausted the psychologist's suggestions, I started to wonder what the alternative to "small talk" actually looks like. Perhaps there are only two types of talk that *can't* be deemed "small": the emotionally draining and the pseudo-intellectual intolerable. On the former, there's a time and a place for a deep chat about your feelings and spiritual wellbeing, but most of the time it feels toe-curlingly self-indulgent and is best saved for dogs, death-beds or paid professionals.

Then there's the other sort of "deep" conversation about the grand metaphysical themes of existence. (The horror, the horror.) A chat that's likely to yield zero answers, but comes with a non-zero risk of inflicting paralysing existential boredom on both participants. Anyone who's met *that* person at a party knows both of these "deep" options are quantumly worse than surface-level chats about the weather, football or literally anything else.

**But, my all time favorites are: 'What are you reading?' 'Who is your favorite author?' or 'Which books can I find in your bookshelves?'**

It appears I was too quick to judge small talk. Perhaps with my favorite questions, there's a certain beauty in the preconscious verbal ping-pong that happens with these questions. People usually read. People care about books. And everyone else cares about the weather, and it changes all the time. In a nutshell, small talk is there for a reason – it has conventions, and conventions can be followed competently. Sure, small talk is cheap, but aren't we all? And having endured this lengthy written testimony to the foolishness of deep talk, perhaps you too are convinced that small talk is the only talk worth talking. So, what are you reading?